

sphere. The flora also is described as being 'an evolutionary pump'. Human use of the area is described and, importantly, so are the effects of climate change. Significantly, the area covered by snow is predicted to shrink over the next thirty years by 18-66 per cent!

Part III comprises compilation maps of the native vegetation of NSW. These detail existing vegetation and reconstructed vegetation. There are three appendices. One provides estimates of present-day area of vegetation classes in NSW and the ACT and per cent cleared since settlement. Another lists endangered ecological communities and their inferred relationships to the vegetation classes, and the third lists the changes to vegetation class and formation names between version 1.1 of the vegetation classification of NSW and version 2.1 (this book).

Ocean Shores to Desert Dunes is ideal, not only for the student of vegetation formations but also for someone with no knowledge of vegetation classification. In fact, if this book was provided to a person with no interest in vegetation, they would become a convert.



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Albatross: elusive mariners of the Southern Ocean

by Aleks Terauds and illustrated by Fiona Stewart

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colour photographs. ISBN 1877069264. RRP \$39.95

Albatross is a fine work that focuses on five species of Albatross that breed at Australian sites in the Southern Ocean. The book is lavishly illustrated with stunning photographs of some of the largest flying birds on earth. Scattered throughout one also finds images of the remote sites at which they breed and the other mostly marine species that share these islands.

The book consists of five easy-to-read chapters. The reader is first provided with an overview of the four breeding sites,

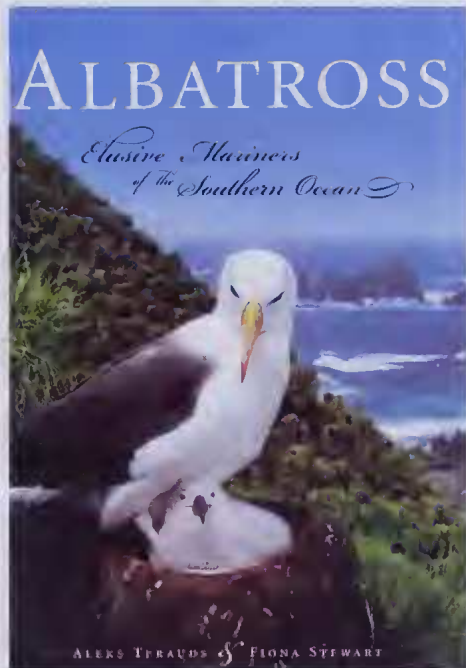
three scattered around Tasmania and the fourth, Macquarie Island, well to the south and approximately halfway to the Antarctic continent. A chapter documenting the catastrophic impact that humans have had on the marine mammals and birds in Bass Strait and the Southern Ocean follows. Here we learn that 18th and 19th century industries, focused on the recovery of oil, fur and feathers, decimated marine vertebrate populations. In a climate of economic greed and fierce competition

accessible whale, seal, penguin and albatross populations were taken to the brink of extinction. Some, such as Elephant seals and Australian Sea Lions in Bass Strait, were pushed over the edge. Following the collapse of these land-based industries, feral animals impacted on returning fauna, especially the smaller seabirds. With the development of long-line fishing in the late 1950s a new threat for the larger seabirds, including the albatross, appeared. Although much has been done to mitigate the impact of these fisheries we learn that it is these activities that now pose the greatest threat to our albatross. Reflecting Aleks Terauds' passion for albatross, this conservation message extends well beyond this chapter and is the central theme of the book.

A third chapter provides an overview of each of the five species treated here: Wandering, Shy, Black-browed, Grey-headed and Light-mantled Sooty Albatross. From tips on identifying these species at sea to detailed accounts of life history, population trends and feeding habitats, the reader is provided with a very thorough understanding of their ecology. The book concludes with two shorter chapters; one providing a synopsis of the Australian conservation efforts, the other providing insights into the challenges and joys of living and working on the island breeding sites.

Although upfront in stating that this book covers albatross that breed in Australia, a brief foray into those species that occur in Australian waters as non-breeding visitors would have been welcome. At times several such species (e.g. Yellow-nosed Albatross and Buller's Albatross) are a major component of the albatross fauna in near coastal waters of southern Australia yet these receive no mention. Indeed, taking this a step further, a short chapter on the albatross of the world would have helped set the context for those species that breed in Australia.

Reflecting the author's experiences almost of all of the photographs were taken on the nesting grounds. Given that albatross spend most of their lives in the open



ocean, and it is here that they are truly masters of their environment, a wider selection of photographs showing birds at sea would have also been welcomed.

These are, however, minor criticisms reflecting personal taste and do not detract from what is a beautifully illustrated and well-researched book. Aleks Terauds and Fiona Stewart are to be commended for providing a window into the lives of albatross, a glimpse at the wild places on which they nest, and for bringing the plight of these magnificent birds to the attention of all. This work is recommended to anyone with an interest in natural history, conservation or marine environments.

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